

REORGANIZATION MEETING SPEECH
MAYOR ROBERT J. SEADER
1 JANUARY 2015

"The Year in Review and a Look to the Future"

I thank you all for joining us today, this first day of a new year, and, I predict, the first day in what will prove to be a great year for the Borough of Dunellen.

2014 was an eventful year for Dunellen and I am sure that 2015 will be even more significant.

I would like to congratulate Ken Bayer on his re-election to another three year term as Councilmen. Ken has been a great liaison to the Department of Public Works. I'd like to welcome back Kevin Bachorik to his seat on the Council. I am pleased to be able to work with them for the next three years.

I'd like to give a special thank you to Mark Bieniek who took over after his father's passing and proved to be a valuable member of our governing body.

As I look about the room I am convinced that the Borough's elected officials have the best interests of all our residents as their primary goal and I look forward to working with all of you: Mistery Petracca, Baudendistel, Bayer, Bachorik, Cilento, and Cote in the coming year.

2014 was a year filled with much personal sorrow. Tragedy and misfortune came to many in Dunellen. Some of us lost friends and loved ones. Others suffered the devastation of loss through fire and other natural disaster. All of us grieve the passing of residents such as John Colucci and Henry Hodulik who served the people of Dunellen faithfully and tirelessly.

On a larger front, though the national and State economies appear to be recovering from the Great Recession of 2008, economic fortunes in Dunellen are not yet being lifted in the rising recovery tide.

Too many of our residents still live in fear of foreclosure or are out of work or under-employed and there are too many Dunellen businesses finding it difficult to keep their doors open. All of our property values remain lower than in 2007.

I am well aware of the personal hurt many of you are experiencing and I want to assure everyone that the elected officials to whom you have entrusted the governance of your community recognize your pain, feel your fear, and collectively we pledge to continue to make your municipal government receptive and responsive to your needs.

In our current economic climate, it is a constant challenge to maintain essential services while keeping property taxes as low as we safely and reasonably can. Each year, we get a high score on the state's Best Practices Survey of

municipal budgeting and management procedures, and we adhere strictly to the 2% CAP on revenues and expenditures.

As our town has demonstrated time after time, we are skilled at going it alone and doing it our way. Are these tough times? Sure they are! But I firmly believe as Robert H. Schuler once said: “Tough times never last, but tough people do.” Good things are soon to come to Dunellen and I have no patience with those who cry doom and gloom and surrender to daydreams of a past that never was.

Abraham Lincoln once said: “The best way to predict the future is to create it.” And we are doing that each and every day in Dunellen.

We have much to be proud of as we begin a new year, and I’d like to share a few of our highlights with you.

First, Dunellen downtown: the old Towne Pharmacy building looks like it is nearing completion of its remodeling and expansion. The three-story mixed use residential and commercial building across from Borough Hall is now complete, and a similar one is planned to go next to Advance Auto Parts on North Avenue. All will bring some interesting new commercial and professional tenants, along with new residents who will live in our downtown.

In other parts of town, general contractors have been building new homes on old plots and many home owners have decided to stay in Dunellen and to expand or upgrade their houses.

The most exciting news is also the most important event to happen to Dunellen in 50 years: we are moving ahead with the development of the old Art Color complex. As you already know, there is proposed a retail building on South Washington Avenue, a large anchor store such as a supermarket in the center, and upwards of 340 townhouses in the back. The entire project will be designed to reflect our proud railroad tradition and be in conformity with our Transit Village designation.

We continue in our efforts to find every way we can to minimize municipal expenses. A principal way is through our very helpful system of shared services with the County of Middlesex, the City of Edison, the Borough of Middlesex and the Township of Piscataway in the areas of yard waste, gasoline, health services, dispatch, and animal services, among many others.

The Sanitary Sewer Utility is now well established and about to begin its third year of raising important revenue for capital improvements while shifting the financial burden to those who discharge more water into our sewer system. We have a number of important rehabilitation projects underway for 2015 regarding pipe repair and pumping station improvements.

North Avenue is a festive treat for the eyes this holiday season, due in part to the new street lamps that have been installed from Madison Avenue to Washington

Avenue. I am pleased to tell you that we have received a Transit Village grant to extend those lights up toward Washington Memorial Park.

Infrastructure improvements are very important for Dunellen. Later this month, we will be holding the bid for Dunellen Avenue Phase II, a project that will repave that street for two long blocks between Lincoln Avenue and Madison Avenue. We were also awarded \$300,000 to repave a section of Madison Avenue, from North Avenue to we hope First Street.

Other ongoing projects include the South Avenue Railroad Culvert, which when completed will greatly diminish upstream flooding; a Middlesex County project to fix the culvert on South Madison Avenue adjacent the Fire House, a second County culvert project on Gertrude Terrace, and a third County culvert project on South Avenue near Hall Street. Our goal in all these projects is to alleviate the potential for localized flooding during heavy weather events and to use the lower flood elevation data to prevail upon FEMA to re-draw their unfair and disastrous flood maps that have hurt so many of our residents.

Last year, I spoke of our collective vision of turning Dunellen into a cultural and entertainment mecca. Many groups are helping to make this a reality. One notable artistic enterprise was Plays in the Park from Dunellen Skylight Theatre Productions which presented a riotous “Putnam County Spelling Bee” last August. Other groups include Gravity Arts Initiative and the Washington Rock

Ballet. Finally, the Edward Maurer Foundation held its third annual Haunted Trail in Columbia Park last October to benefit the Maurer House in our new Open Space park off Mountainview Terrace.

We were sorry to see the retirement of Dunellen Library Director Joan Henry after ten years of excellent service to the library customers in Dunellen. But are pleased to welcome our new Library Director, Samuel Latini, who comes to us from Carteret and I am sure that Carteret's loss will be Dunellen's gain. The Dunellen Library continues to be the Jewel in the Crown of Dunellen and an invaluable resource to our community. It circulated over 39,368 items in 2014 and as a cooperative member of the Libraries of Middlesex Automation Consortium loans thousands of items to out of towners, as well as enabling Dunellen residents to borrow from over 30 regional libraries. Last year, the library received over \$14,759 in donations, provided nearly 478 programs to adults, children and teens, and counted over 14,046 users on its public computers. The annual Friends Holiday Party in December was a great success and the library continues to be on the cutting edge of innovative technology by offering wireless Internet so patrons can use their laptops anywhere in the building. Other significant accomplishments include a wildly popular summer reading program and book discussion groups for children and adults.

The Recreation Department had an interesting year as the Commission did an outstanding job running the department and its programs while we searched for a new director. In September, Alex Miller came on board and he quickly showed that he has what it takes to continue the department's fine tradition of fun and educational programs for children, teens, and adults. Over 200 Seniors enjoyed picnics and parties and trips to the movies. Community events included the Halloween Parade, Santa Around Town, the Holiday Lighting Ceremony in Washington Park, the Holiday House Decorating Contest, and the Easter Egg Hunt.

The Department of Public Works continues its excellent job of keeping our Borough running well through its regular clean-up of the streams and catch-basins, building and parks maintenance, street sweeping, leaf bag collection, roll off, and the countless other tasks Jerry Schaefer, Ron Safar, and their small but dedicated staff do each and every day, most of it quietly and behind the scenes. They really came through last winter keeping the streets plowed during that terrible almost three month long snow storm.

As I look around this crowded room, a room that is not only the Council Chambers but also serves as the meeting place of the Planning Board and the Municipal Court, I am grateful to our Municipal Court Judge, Dennis Fackelman, who oversees a smoothly running and productive court, to Terry Crisafulli our

Court Administrator, her new Deputy, Lauren Colletti, our two prosecutors: Thomas Lanza and Paul Garelick, and our Public Defenders, Joe Stransky and Bob Spengler. The Dunellen Municipal Court brought in approximately \$200,000 in revenue in 2014 and its personnel processed nearly 5,000 cases, one of the highest rates in central New Jersey, and they do so with fairness and efficiency.

The Dunellen Police Department is ever vigilant under the leadership of Chief Jeffrey Nelson. In 2014, the Department perfected their use of the new e-ticket system that speeds up and enhances the roadside stops. Hundreds of Dunellen residents came out for National Night Out in August. The Department received two new vehicles, Ford Interceptor Explorers, to replace two Dodge Chargers at the end of their useful patrol life. The new SUV's are more functional while being as powerful and getting better gas mileage than traditional police patrol vehicles. The Department also welcomed new patrolman Nicholas Goldman to its ranks, received more than \$50,000 in grants, made 51 DWI arrests and 3,000 motor vehicle summonses.

The 49 members of Dunellen's volunteer Fire Department had a very productive year with 334 fire calls, meetings and events and 6,100 hours devoted to outstanding public service.

The volunteer Dunellen Rescue Squad is thriving with new members and continues to provide emergency medical services to our residents as well as participating in community events and readiness at high school athletic games.

I would like to give recognition to our hard working volunteers who serve long hours on the Recreation Commission, which oversees our many athletic and recreational programs; the Shade Tree Commission which received a \$20,000 grant to plant trees and shrubs in our parks and right-of-ways and was awarded the Tree City Certification for the 10th year; the Library Board of Trustees; the Planning Board; and the Parking Authority, which each year gifts the borough \$50,000 to help lessen the burden of property taxes. The people who serve on our boards and commissions labor at often thankless tasks, but they help create policy, serve as emissaries to the public, often do hard physical labor maintaining vital facilities, and generally ensure that everything runs professionally in their respective departments.

And speaking of volunteers, I would like to thank the many service organizations who enhance the quality of life for all our residents: the Dunellen-Green Brook Rotary Club sponsored its month-long Pasta Festival at Zupko's Cinema and Restaurant in April, a Classic Car Show in the Skinner Plaza parking lot in June, Shredding Day for documents in September, and provides hot chocolate to the children at the annual Tree Lighting ceremony in bitter cold

December. The Dunellen Education Foundation held another great 5-K run in September and gives out thousands of dollars of funding to worthwhile educational projects each year.. The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars sponsored the Memorial Day Parade which brought out hundreds of marchers and the Veteran's Day celebration that was appropriately recognized at a solemn ceremony in Washington Park. DREAMS, the parent support group for the disabled children in our school district, donated five iPads to the Multiply Disabled class. Other important civic organizations include the boys and girls scouts, FISH, the Knights of Columbus, the Dunellen PTO, the Dunellen Historical Society, the Dunellen Lions Club, and the Friends of the Dunellen Library.

I am particularly proud of our Destroyer High School Football team, which Coach Dave DeNapoli led to another great season and that also saw his 100th career game victory.

I extend a special thank you to the dedicated men and women who staff our Fire Department and our Rescue Squad. These volunteers daily demonstrate their commitment to public service. I sleep better at night knowing that these men and women are well trained and well supplied. Their community spirit is a model for us all. The Fire Department's annual Street Fair in September is always a wonderful opportunity for the entire town to turn out for a day of festivity and food on our main street. This yearly event is now being followed during the Columbus

Day weekend with the Dunellen Downtown Management Organization's HarvestFest where over 100 artists and crafters sell their creations in Washington Memorial Park.

Dunellen is truly a volunteer community and we could not exist without all these people.

I would now like to recognize the hard work of the Parking Authority personnel, Sandy, Charlotte, and Dave; Scott in the Construction Office and his code officials Mike and Ken; George in Code Enforcement; Ray and Donna in our Tax Collection Office and Rich the Tax Assessor; Scott Olsen in Finance, Debbie in Accounts Payable; Samantha our Deputy Registrar, and all the other people who, with dedication and good will, serve the residents of the Borough of Dunellen, day in and day out.

Finally, I must thank Karen, Bobby and Kelly Seader—my family. Without their support and understanding, I could not be sharing this day with you.

In conclusion, I predict that the year 2015 will be one of the most important in the history of Dunellen. The long-elusive goal of downtown Redevelopment is slowly becoming a reality. New and renovated buildings with new businesses for our residents are replacing old and tired structures. Walking the streets of our downtown, I feel energy in the air, an excitement I haven't perceived in years. Things are moving. Community spirit is on the rise. Wonderful possibilities are

coming. I am pleased, grateful, and privileged to share Dunellen's great future with all of you. Thank you and Happy New Year!